

Franklin Makeover

More than 500 volunteers build the school's new playground on Saturday

COLLEEN MENSCHING, Staff Writer
Redlands Daily Facts

Article Launched: 03/31/2007 11:19:13 PM PDT

REDLANDS - It was a Cesar Chavez Day gift to Franklin Elementary School and the community.

More than 500 volunteers of all ages rolled up their sleeves Saturday to build Franklin Elementary School's new playground in a single day.

"I have been here 21 years and I have never seen this kind of turn out," said third-grade teacher Tracy Waggoner. "We have a tremendously supportive community, but this is above and beyond."

Chavez, the late activist renowned for his efforts on behalf of farm workers, is honored each year by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's CaliforniaVolunteers program.

This year, CaliforniaVolunteers partnered with KaBOOM! - a Washington, D.C. organization dedication to putting quality playgrounds with walking distance of every child - to have 10 playgrounds built in California on Cesar Chavez Day.

"This is a bigger-than-average KaBOOM! build day," said KaBOOM! project manager Adam Sloey, looking at the mass of volunteers. "It's wild."

Franklin Principal Rhonda Bruce got the ball rolling last year by applying for a grant for the project.

The award criteria included a need for playground equipment, a site that would be available to the public and a 10-percent match of the grant funds provided by California Volunteers and facilitated by Hands On Inland Empire, a United Way organization.

In February the Redlands Unified School District agreed to make the \$7,500 contribution.

"The great thing about KaBOOM! is - instead of just saying: RHere is your money. Go and build it' - they say: RHere's how we're going to do it,'" Bruce said.

For some people that meant the heavy lifting of 200 cubic yards of mulch. Other teams built picnic tables and benches. Landscaping, cement mixing and mural

painting were all part of the effort.

The playground was built to the specifications of Franklin students, parents and teachers who participated in a "dream playground" planning session in January. The process ensured that, though there were 10 playgrounds being built Saturday, each was unique.

Fourth-grader Diana Ramirez, 9, said the old jungle gym was fun "but it hurt because it was all metal."

Ramirez's classmate Andrew Chacon, also 9, called the new playground "pretty amazing."

"I'm pretty sure everyone is excited to have a new playground," Andrew said.

More than two dozen businesses and service organizations made in-kind donations. Everything from Hotdog-on-a-Stick lemonade to a Redlands Community Hospital nurse was donated to make the build a success.

Jan Stephens of Hands On Inland Empire said their organization encourages companies to volunteer in teams.

"We're encouraging that because there's a bonding experience when you're doing something like that," Stephens said.

Volunteers came from as far as Sacramento to work at the Franklin site.

One group came with Victoria Keyser from Claremont after hearing a call for volunteers on the radio.

"It's just a chance for my friends and relatives and colleagues to join together and share the love," Keyser said.